

A Nerd in the Hand

Rick Moranis first made his name as something of a shrinking violet in the comedy hit *The Little Shop Of Horrors*. In his latest video release *Honey, I Shrunk The Kids* he plays a hapless sort of chap once again. Having given up on the idea of ever playing a dashing romantic lead, Martyn Clayden asked him what it's like to always play the prize nerd.

On first meeting, Rick Moranis looks the kind of guy that Californian lifeguards love to kick sand at. Polite and bespectacled, he could be the local bank clerk that never quite summons up the courage to ask the office wallflower for a date. It's an image he's not slow to acknowledge.

'The character I play in *Ghostbusters* I guess, was a nerd, and since then it seems that everything I do they like to call me a nerd. If I swapped my glasses for contact lenses and tatoos and built up my upper body, then I'd no longer be a nerd. But in real life - yeah, I'm a nerd, I admit it'.

But this supposed mega-wimp has nonetheless earned himself an impressive reputation as a comedy writer and performer, culminating in three acclaimed appearances in *Parenthood*, *Ghostbusters 2*, and the surprise hit *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*. As with all comic talent, success came after the hard graft of stand-up humour ('I absolutely loathed it') in Toronto, and a hectic spell as one of the leading lights with 'SCTV', the canadian equivalent of *Saturday Night Live*, that boasted Harold Ramis and John Candy among their number.

Rick claims that after doing radio work at school, he 'fell into showbusiness' after being frustrated that he couldn't pick up his favourite shows at home on his TV. 'When you flicked around the dial on the TV in Toronto, the clear picture was hockey, *Coronation St.*, and documentaries on hedgehogs, while the fuzzy picture was *I Love Lucy* and *Dick Van Dyke*, so I never thought I could be part of that'.

Persistence paid off, and in 1984





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Rick landed the plumb role of the nerd who became the Keymaster in the smash-hit *Ghostbusters* opposite old friends and colleagues Ramis, Murray and Aykroyd. He also had the enviable job of taking Sigourney Weaver in his arms, but it seems even here things didn't go quite as scheduled. 'There's a scene where we're both possessed, the Keymaster and the Gatekeeper, and the script says I take her in my arms and we kiss. Well, I'm 5'5' and she's over 6 foot, so Sigourney came up with the solution - 'maybe it would be better if I took you in my arms!' Their acting styles were also different, as she came from the Yale School of Drama and he was from TV and Improv. 'She was from the classical background of wanting to rehearse and refine, and every one else was going, What? Rehearse? Let's just save it for the take?'

As a result of *Ghostbusters*, Rick was

chosen by Mel Brooks to play the lead in his wacky spoof of *Star Wars*, *Spaceballs*, and the two enjoyed the collaboration immensely ('It was like writing the show of shows'), despite modest returns at the box office. He's keeping an eye on the next Brooks vehicle which is based on a Donald Trump-like character: 'It has a great title - *Life Stinks!*'

But undoubtedly Rick's happiest partnership has been with that even more madcap artist, Steve Martin. The two were perfectly teamed as evil dentist and gentle florist in *The Little Shop of Horrors* ('the plant was built over a pit with 55 puppeteers pulling levers and cables below- the graffiti was fantastic'), and most

recently as the fanatical 'pursuit of excellence' brother of Steve in *Parenthood*. They'll shortly be matched once more in *My Blue Heaven*. It's got a script by Norah Ephron (*When Harry Met Sally*), is directed by Herbert Ross, and has Steve as an Italian mobster who's relocated under the witness protection programme to a community in the middle of nowhere. I play the junior regional FBI agent that's assigned to his case, and when Steve gets bored he starts committing petty crime and making my life miserable. This is my third picture with Steve, and I'd do any number with him'.

Rick isn't complimentary about all his work or colleagues, as his experience on *Ghostbusters 2* illustrates. 'I was very disappointed with it. I thought we were making the same kind of movie as the first one, and when I finally saw it I thought it was sluggish, mean-spirited, and a lot of things didn't work. If it was up to me I wouldn't show it to a 4 year-old-it's too scary'.

Four year-olds had little to fear in *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* in which Rick played the eccentric boffin who cracked the puzzle of reducing matter but hadn't bargained on the kids accidentally straying into the miniaturising beam. Meant as a low budget summer filler, the Disney executives weren't expecting great things, especially when sized up to the opposition. 'In the States it was released in the same week as *Batman*, so they called me on the Thursday and said, 'Don't look for money this weekend, because it won't happen - don't worry if it's only done \$3-4 million'. Then on Saturday morning they called back - 'that \$3-4 million? We did it last night! It was the biggest opening they ever had (\$14 million)'.

This time round, Rick is going to be wary of making the kind of mistake he made with *Ghostbusters 2* - he promises not to do *Honey 2* unless the script is brilliant. So for the time being he's going back to his shy, contented existence as the Hollywood nerd.

'At my level they don't come to me first with the good material - they all go to Jack Nicholson first and then filter down through everybody else passed. But slowly I think I'm edging my way up.....'